

## Lifestyle and Mental Wellbeing

**What is a healthy lifestyle:** Our lifestyle can be thought of as a collection of daily functions and behaviours. It is commonly known that a healthy lifestyle can be beneficial for one's wellbeing in terms of physical health. Recently, there has been growing evidence highlighting the impact of lifestyle factors on mental health.

In order to maintain a healthy lifestyle, the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends engaging in regular physical activity, limiting alcohol consumption and eating healthily. You can read more about how to develop and maintain healthy lifestyle habits here:  **NHS Live Well website:** <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/>

**Maintaining a healthy lifestyle during a pandemic:** This information has been adapted to account for the ongoing pandemic and subsequent impact on different areas of our lives. The aim of this information sheet is to provide you with insights to help you cope and adapt during these unprecedented times. It is likely that recent changes in our day to day lives and routines will bring and with some challenges in maintaining healthy habits, however it may also bring some opportunity to try new things and be creative.



Think of lifestyle habits as your first line of defence in terms of wellbeing. Such changes alone might be limited in addressing mental health problems and so the following suggestions are designed to be used along with the other psychotherapeutic resources provided in consultation with your GP.

Below we will outline the most important aspects of lifestyle in relation to mental health and provide links to further reading and resources.

### Physical Activity

There are a number of reasons why physical activity is good for your body, but did you know that physical activity is also beneficial for your mental health and wellbeing? In fact, a programme of physical activity is recommended by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines in the treatment of mild depression for adults. We also know that some types of exercise can reduce symptoms of anxiety. But we understand that often the symptoms of depression and anxiety can make it hard to engage in physical activity. Sometimes it's difficult to motivate yourself to go outside when you feel your energy is already depleted. Or sometimes our thoughts and expectations of ourselves can hold us back when we try to make changes, such as fear of being judged by others.

**Overcoming barriers and getting active:** Recent lockdown restrictions may have had an effect on your physical activity levels or have led to changes to your routine or the way you exercise. Or maybe you have physical health conditions that bring their own challenges in terms of staying active comfortably and safely. Other common barriers include lack of energy, fear of failure or even the weather.

Support from friends, family, like minded others or even your GP can be very helpful when you are trying to make positive lifestyle changes. If you do suffer from physical illness or injury, it may be advisable to check in with your GP beforehand.

**Tips for Increasing Your Activity Levels:** Physical activity does not have to involve running a 5K road race or spending hours lifting heavy weights for it to be effective (but it can be if that's what works for you!) – in fact, even a short burst of 10 minutes brisk walking can positively impact your mood.

- Aim for 20 minutes moderate activity per day if this is realistic for you
- Physical activity can include **any type of recreational or leisure activity** ranging from doing the housework or gardening to doing exercise
- Set **SMART** goals to monitor your progress and keep motivation up.  
Click this resource for hints: [Goals Sheet. Get Self Help.](#)
- Consider what type of activity will keep you motivated, ask yourself what do you enjoy doing? What have you enjoyed doing in the past? For example, if you value keeping physically fit and active but running is not your cup of tea, then consider alternatives, such as cycling or completing home workouts.
- Remember that positive change takes time, reward yourself for progress made and for doing something good for your mental health
- Challenge negative thoughts that get in your way.  
Click for this great resource to start: [http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/headroom/cbt/catch\\_it.pdf](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/headroom/cbt/catch_it.pdf)

**Resources to help you get started (click for direct access):**

NHS Inform	<a href="https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/keeping-active">https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/keeping-active</a>
NHS Fitness studio	<a href="https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/">https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/</a>
Glasgow Club	<a href="https://glasgowclub.org/Pages/Home.aspx">https://glasgowclub.org/Pages/Home.aspx</a>
Mental health Foundation	<a href="https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/how-to-using-exercise">https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/how-to-using-exercise</a>

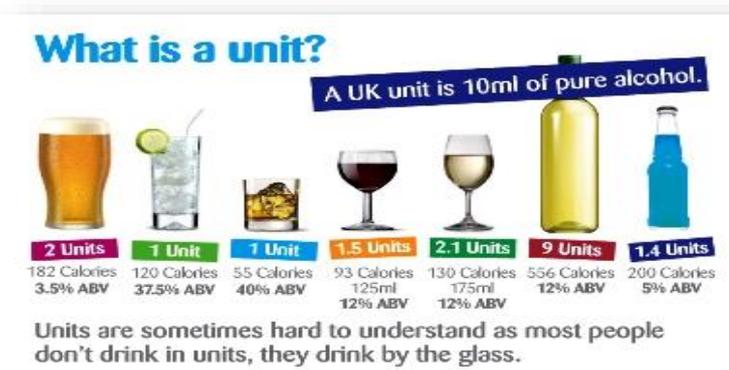
## Alcohol Use

### Why do we drink and what does it have to do with our mental health?

Alcohol and mental health are closely related in that one of the main effects of alcohol is its ability to change our mood. For example, having a drink after a stressful day at work as a 'reward', or drinking to cope in certain situations that might normally make you feel uncomfortable or anxious - often referred to as 'dutch courage'. Sometimes alcohol is used to block out distressing thoughts or feelings.

In the immediate short term, alcohol might provide feelings of relaxation, help us to unwind or indeed block out those distressing thoughts or feelings. However, alcohol itself is a depressant and once its effects wear off, you are likely to feel much worse. Drinking more than the recommended guidelines can have detrimental effects on our physical and mental health.

Recent restrictions may have had an impact on your relationship with alcohol, perhaps you have started drinking more at home. If you notice your drinking habits have changed in response to recent events and have noticed a change in your mood, it might be useful to keep a tracking diary or consider alternative ways of coping with stress or boredom (check out our stress group online: <http://wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk/>). Familiarise yourself with the following chart and remember the maximum units per week is now the same for men and women:



### 14 units per week

Alcohol wreaks havoc on sleep and mood and can have a negative impact on other aspects of life such as work and relationships. If you are concerned about your drinking and the impact it may be having on your health, or you think you might be dependent on alcohol **talk to your GP**

### Useful resources:

Unit Calculator <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/understand-your-drinking/unit-calculator>

Alcohol & You (NHS Northumberland & Tyne) <https://web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp/leaflets/Alcohol%20and%20You.pdf>

Alcohol Focus Scotland <https://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/news/alcohol-and-mental-health-are-closely-linked/>

Glasgow Council for Alcohol <https://www.glasgowcouncilonalcohol.org/>

## Social Connection and Physical Distancing

Social distancing is likely to remain a part of our lives for quite some time. We have known for quite some time that social isolation is related to mental health problems and here at wellbeing we have always supported and encouraged people to think of ways of becoming more socially engaged. Remember that if you are feeling lonely, you are not alone in feeling that way.

### Tips for staying connected:

Use technology to **compensate for the nonverbal cues** we are missing from face to face to interactions:

- For example, video calling allows you to interpret people's facial expressions and allows for more comprehensive communication;
- Using headphones while on a phone call can allow you to pick up on voice cues such as tone much better than using speaker
- Learn to recognise passive scrolling
- Social media sites such as facebook, twitter, tiktok and instagram now play a pivotal role in keeping us connected with others both near and far. However, passive browsing has been associated with feelings of isolation.

**If you use these sites, try to use them in a way that is meaningful for you and will allow you to feel connected with others.**

Look for online support groups or common interest groups (such as a book group or a virtual running club). Many community resources have increased their online presence to offer support in these challenging times. An excellent example of this is #Glasgowlifegoeson, run by Glasgow Life. Find out more information here:

<https://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/>



## Sleep

Sleep is fundamental to our functioning and it impacts our emotional health in that it can heavily influence how we deal with stress. Sleep is also related to depression and anxiety, in that we can find that we are sleeping too much or not enough. This might be due to changes in routine, worries about the future, ongoing stressors or even from too much screen time.

You may have been battling sleep problems for quite some time, with quarantine bringing its own challenges. Or maybe you have noticed that with changes to your routine, your sleep has suffered. We have prepared a comprehensive resource on sleep hygiene so you can get the most from your slumber or watch our sleep group online. **Check out our resources online here:** <http://wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk/>

## Routine

It is likely that day to day routines for a lot of people have been turned upside down of late. This will look different for everyone depending on your own circumstances. Routine can benefit our mental health by helping us to cope with uncertainty and change, and to help us develop and maintain healthy lifestyle habits. Having a daily routine can also help us cope in uncertain times.

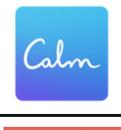
- ✓ You can start by developing a sleep routine as outlined above.
- ✓ Try to incorporate things that matter to you, whether that is connecting with someone you care about, making a nice healthy meal, getting some fresh air or even just dressing your bed every day. Make at least one thing a non-negotiable, for example; every day without fail I will make my bed.
- ✓ Use a planner to help you (see apps on the following page).
- ✓ Take one of our courses for more support in building a routine **Check out our resources online here:** <http://wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk/>
- ✓ Limit your screen time.

Having suicidal thoughts? Discuss with a loved one, call Samaritans on **116 123** or access your **G.P.** or **Crisis Service** via **NHS** on **111**.

**Our recommended resources (click for direct access):**

<b>NHS Inform</b>	Offers the most up-to-date advice on dealing varying mental health difficulties, including the 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">NHS Inform</a>
<b>Wellbeing</b>	Our website offers a variety of self-help materials, groups, and courses for all sorts of problems that you may be facing. Anyone can download the self- help materials. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">Wellbeing Website Glasgow</a>
<b>Mental Health Foundation</b>	A range of content designed to give you more information about mental health and to help you to look after your mental health. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">Your Mental Health - Mental Health Foundation</a>
<b>NHS Every Mind Matters</b>	Interactive website providing you the opportunity to complete a short quiz which creates a Mind Plan of what you can do to improve your mental health. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">Every Mind Matters</a>
<b>Psych Central</b>	Run by mental health professionals offering reliable, trusted information to individuals struggling with a mental health. There is also an excellent quiz section allowing you to find out more about your symptoms and how to manage these. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">PsychCentral for Mental Health</a>
<b>MIND</b>	Information hub provides advice on how to support your mental wellbeing. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">MIND Information Hub</a>
<b>SAMH</b>	Hub of information and guidance about looking after mental health. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">SAMH Guidance for Mental Health</a>

**Useful Apps:**

	Mind Shift	Rather than trying to avoid anxious feelings, Mind Shift stresses the importance of changing how you think about anxiety. It can encourage you to take charge of your life, ride out intense emotions, and face challenging situations
	SAM	SAM might be perfect for you if you're interested in self-help, but meditation isn't your thing. Users are prompted to build their own 24-hour anxiety toolkit that allows you to track anxious thoughts and behaviour over time and learn 25 different self-help techniques.
	Happify	Need a happy fix? With its psychologist-approved mood-training program, the Happify app is your fast-track to a good mood. Try various engaging games, activity suggestions, gratitude prompts and more to train your brain as if it were a muscle, to overcome negative thoughts
	Headspace	The Headspace app makes meditation simple. Learn the skills of mindfulness and meditation by using this app for just a few minutes per day. You gain access to hundreds of meditations on everything from stress and anxiety to sleep and focus.
	Calm	Calm provides people experiencing stress and anxiety with guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, and relaxing music.
	Smiling Mind	Smiling mind is a way to practice daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device. This is helpful during times of stress and is a fun and unique way to help you put a smile on your mind.